

A
DISCOURSE
ABOUT A
SCRUPULOUS CONSCIENCE:

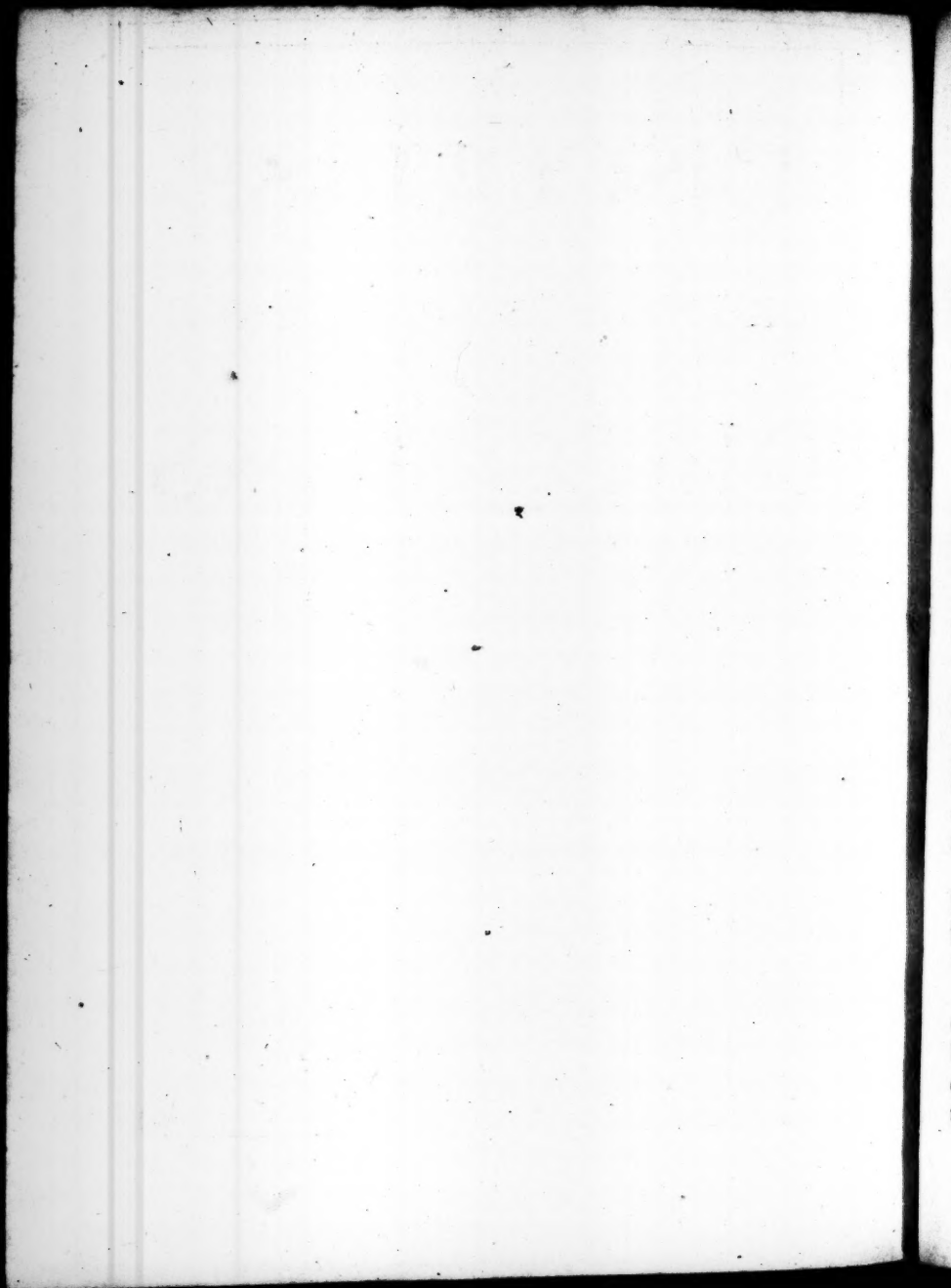
Containing some PLAIN

DIRECTIONS

For the CURE of it.

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ABOUT
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IT is not my Design in the following Discourse, to expose or upbraid the Weakness of any of our Dissenting Brethren ; but rather charitably to contribute what I can towards the healing and curing of it: and this I take for granted, That we cannot do greater Service either to the Church of Christ, or Souls of Men, than by all prudent Means to root those needless Scruples out of their Minds, which have been the Occasion of such unchristian Separations and dangerous Divisions amongst us; at first begun, and still maintained, generally, upon the Account of such Things, as I verily believe, a well-instructed Conscience need not be concerned or disturbed about.

Here I shall first shew what I understand by a Scrupulous Conscience, then observe some few things concerning it; and lastly, offer some plain Rules and Means by which we may best get rid of it.

First, What is a Scrupulous Conscience? Now Conscience, as it is a Rule of our Actions, is nothing else but a Man's Mind or Judgment concerning the moral Goodness or Evil, Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of Things; and as this Judgment is either true or false, so is our Conscience

either good and well-grounded, or erroneous. The Divine Law made known to us either by the light of Nature, or plain Scripture, or direct consequence from it, such as any honest man may understand, is the Rule of Conscience, or of that Judgment we make of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of things: so that our Conscience is a safe Rule and Guide of Actions no further, than as it self is directed and warranted by the Law of God.

1. A good and well grounded Conscience is, when we carefully abstain from whatever God hath forbidden, don't neglect doing any thing which he hath commanded, and as for other Matters left indifferent and at liberty, we do them or forbear doing of them, according as the Rules of obedience to Superiours, Prudence, and Charity, do require. This is the Health and sound State of the Mind.

2. An erroneous Conscience is, when we judge that to be evil or unnecessary which God hath expressly commanded, and is our Duty; or that to be good and necessary which he hath plainly forbid, and is really sinful. Now our Consciences cannot alter the nature of things: that which is our Duty remaineth so, and we sin by omitting it, notwithstanding we in our Consciences think it unlawful to be done; and what is really Evil continueth such, and is Sin in us, however our Consciences tell us it is our duty to do it: and the fault is more or less compassionate and pardonable, as the causes of the Error are more or less voluntary and avoidable. This is a grievous Disease and deadly Sicknes of the Mind, when we thus grossly err in our Judgments, and act according to our mistaken Opinion of Things.

3. A scrupulous Conscience is conversant about things in their own Nature indifferent, and it consists

Either in strictly tying up our selves to some things which God hath no where commanded; as the *Pharisees* made great conscience of washing before they did eat, and abun-

abundance of other unnecessary Rites and Usages they had of Mens own inventing and devising, which they as religiously, nay more carefully observed than the indisputable Commands of God himself:

Or in a conscientious abstaining from somethings which are not forbid, nor any ways unlawful. *Touch not, taste not, handle not*, doubting and fearing where no Fear is, thinking that they should as much offend God by eating some kind of Meats, wearing some Garments, as they should do were they guilty of Murder and Adultery. Which is the Case of many amongst us, who by such Scrupulosity about little matters, seem more precise and austere than other good and honest Christians are, or themselves need or ought to be.

Far be it from me, by any thing I shall now say, to discourage the greatest and tenderest care any Christian can take, to keep himself from all Sin, from all Occasions and Temptations to it, from the least appearance of Evil, of what is really such: and to do any thing that is in it self sinful, out of confidence that it is lawful, is far worse and a more grievous Offence than to abstain from many things which are truly lawful, out of an Opinion that they are sinful. Notwithstanding this, I cannot but reckon it the chief Policy of the Devil, the grand Enemy of all that is good, when he cannot persuade us that there is nothing at all sinful or unlawful, than to make us suspect every thing for such, or at least, that there is great danger of displeasing God by the most indifferent and innocent Actions; by these means ensnaring and entangling Mens Consciences, and rendring Religion a most troublesome Burden to them.

A scrupulous Conscience therefore starts and boggles, where there is no real Evil or Mischief; is afraid of omitting or doing what may be omitted or done without Sin. Which I know not how better to illustrate than by those
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unaccountable Antipathies or Prejudices that some men have against some sort of Meats, or living Creatures, which have not the least harm or hurt in them, yet are so offensive and dreadful to such Persons, that they fly from them as they would from a Tyger or Bear, and avoid them as they would do the Plague or Poyson. Just thus do some Men run out of the Church at the sight of a Surplice, as if they had been scared by the Apparition of a Ghost.

I proceed to the second thing I propounded, to observe to you some few general things concerning this scrupulous Conscience; as,

I. That this is a very sickly, crazy temper of Mind, a great Indisposition, a state of Weakness and Infirmary, It ariseth from Ignorance and want of right Understanding our Religion, from undue timorousness or unsetledness of Mind, from Melancholy, or unreasonable Prejudices and Mistakes about the Nature of things. Such scrupulous Persons are like fearful Women, that wander in the Dark, who seeing nothing to affright them, yet fancy many things, which make them tremble every step they take: or like those who see only by an uncertain glimmering twilight, their Imagination once abus'd and prepossess'd, transforms every Object into a Monster or Gyant.

Thus this Scrupulous is the same with what in other Words some call a tender Conscience, so tender that every thing hurts and wounds it, like a tender Eye which the least Dust or Smoke grievously offends, or a tender Constitution of Body, which the least Air or Wind mightily disorders and discomposes. Now this is far from being any Vertue or Commendation in us, this is no desirable Qualification, nor a matter of Ambition to be thought Men of such tender Consciences, no more than it is for a Man's Reputation to be sickly and often indispos'd. A good Conscience is firm and steady, well settled and resolved, and such needless Scruples about things lawful are at the best

best a sign of an ungovern'd Fancy, and a weak Judgment. As the niceness and squeamishness of a mans Stomach that distasts wholsom Food is a symptom of an unsound and unhealthy Body. This doth not argue any extraordinary holiness or purity above others, as the Pharisee conceited of himself, *Stand off, come not nigh me, touch me not, for I am holier than thou*, because he washed himself so often. No, we are yet in a childish state, and whilst we are frighted with such Bug-bears and Phantasms, we have not yet arrived to the Understanding or Resolution of a Man.

2. This Scrupulosity about little matters may be, and is often a sign of Hypocrisie. I take not upon my self to judge any Persons. Let every man look to himself; but thus certainly it was with the Scribes and Pharisees of old; They strained at every Gnat, stumbled at every Straw, would starve sooner than eat their Meat with defiled hands, would not for the World wrong a Man of a Cummin-seed, or a spear of Mint, and by this wonderful exactness and strictness in some instances, they easily gained the Reputation of the greatest Saints; so that it is said to have been an ordinary Proverb among the Jews, *That if but two Persons in the World went to Heaven, one of them would be a Scribe the other a Pharisee*. Yet for all this, if we will believe our Saviour's account of them, they made nothing of swallowing Camels, living in the greatest and most known Wickedness.

Alas! their Consciences would not give them leave to enter into the Governours Hall to go amongst the Heathens, for fear of being polluted by them, yet at the same time they stuck not at suborning false Witnesses against the best and most innocent Person that ever lived. They blamed the Disciples for plucking the ears of Corn on the Sabbath-day, as if they, poor tender-hearted men, were offended and grieved to the Soul at such Prophaneness, and yet they thought it nothing to deny relief and succour to their own Parents,

Parents, when in Want or Distress; they made no Bones of Rapine and Extortion, oppressing the Poor, or devouring Widows Houses. By their curiosity about some external Observances, they hoped to make amends for their gross Transgressions in other Cases of far greater weight and moment. Since they denied themselves many things which God had allow'd them, they hop'd he would readily forgive them, tho in some other things they took a greater Liberty than he had permitted them.

Had any of us been present when *Mary, St. John 12. 3.* took the Ointment of Spikenard, very costly, and anointed the Feet of Jesus, and had heard *Judas's Rebuke, Why was not this Ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the Poor?* (He scrupled such a profuse expence, tho about our Saviour himself. He thought it might have been better employ'd, to more useful purposes.) Should we not from this have strait concluded him the most charitable and conscientious of all Christ's Disciples, and yet this over-great care for the Poor was only a pretence and covering for his theevish Intention.

They therefore who are so scrupulous about little indifferent matters, ought to approve their Honesty and Sincerity by the most accurate Diligence in the Practise of all other Duties of Religion, which are plainly and undoubtedly such. They who pretend to such a tender Conscience above other Men must know, that the World will watch them as to the fairness and justice of their Dealings, the calmness of their Tempers, their behaviour in their several Relations, their Modesty, Humility, Charity, Peaceableness, and the like. If in all these things they keep the same Tenor, use the same caution and circumspection, and be uniformly conscientious, then it must be acknowledged, that it is only Weakness or Ignorance that raiseth their Scruples, not any vicious Principle; and the condition of those who are under the Power of such Scruples, is much to be commiserated.

But,

But, when I see a Man scrupling praying by a Book or Form, and yet living without any sense of God or fear of him, afraid of a Ceremony in God's Worship, and not afraid of a plain damnable Sin, of Covetousness, rash censuring his Brethren, of Hatred and Strife, Faction and Schism, and Disobedience to Superiours; when I see one that out of Conscience refuseth to kneel at the Sacrament, and yet dares totally neglect the Communion; who takes great care not to give offence to his weak Brother, but can freely speak evil of Dignities, and despiseth his lawful Governours; it is not then uncharitable to say, That it is not dread of displeasing God, but some other bye end or Interest that acts and moves such a Person, and in pleading the Tenderness of his Conscience he is no other than a downright Hypocrite.

On the other side, Let a Man be never so punctual and critical in his Conformity to all the appointed Ceremonies and Usages in our Church, let him constantly attend God's solemn Worship, and behave himself most reverently and decently at the Publick Prayers; yet if this Man be profane and intemperate, a Derider of true Piety and Godliness, if he lives loosely and at Random, all his regular Devotions, all his bowing and kneeling to the Honour of our Saviour, all his niceness about his Worship to perform it in the most orderly manner, all his Zeal for the Church shall avail him nothing. He is no better than the Pharisee, washing the out-side, whilst he is within full of all Wickedness and Uncleanness. To be so concerned about little things, whilst we make no Conscience of the greater, is the most evident sign that can be given of a false Christian. And hath it not often hapned in the World, that such a mighty Scrupulosity about our Duty hath proved a very successful way of growing great or raising an Estate, by giving Men so fair an opportunity of imposing upon the credulous and unwary? So that I, have known it advised

as an useful Caution to those who would live in the World, always to stand upon your Guard and look to your Pockets, when you deal with those who pretend to greater Tenderness and Exactness than other undoubtedly sober and honest Christians generally do.

3. Where Persons are truly honest and mean well, there is nothing more troublesome and vexatious than such unreasonable Scruples about things lawful. This must needs be an intolerable disturbance to a man's Mind, and breed great Anxiety and Inquietude, when Persons are continually shivering and trembling lest by every thing they do they incur the Divine Displeasure; and it certainly disables a man from performing his necessary Duty. He is likely to make but a slow Progress in his Journey, who instead of going on cheerfully in his way, is frequently at a stand, doubting which foot he should set forward, or what particular Path he should choose. This robs men, in a great measure, of that Peace and Satisfaction which they might otherwise find in Religion, whilst they are daily perplexing themselves with untying Knots which themselves only have fastned. Scruples about things indifferent, when once we attend to and entertain them, like the Plague of Flies amongst the *Egyptians*, will be constantly buzzing in our Ears, and tormenting us with their Impertinency; till at length we come to distrust every thing, and there is nothing that belongs to ordinary Civility, no recreation we can use, no cloaths we can wear, no discourse we can hold with others, no conversation we can maintain, or business which we transact in the World, but we shall raise some trifling Objections or Scruples about it, which will make our Condition continually uneasy and restless. For,

4. These Scruples are infinite and endless: for, being grounded upon some very little and inconsiderable Reason, there is hardly any thing to be done but some small
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Exceptions may be started against it, which may soon puzzle and confound the more ignorant sort of Christians. Thus he that scruples a Minister's officiating in a white Garment, may easily be brought to doubt of the fitness of his doing it in Black, and then he proceeds against any solemn distinct Habit, and at last against the Office of Ministers it self, and tells you all Gods People are holy, and that all Christians are a Royal Priesthood, and we have no need of Teachers, for we are all taught of God. From scrupling the Sign of the *Cross* after Baptism, Men have soon come to question Infant Baptism it self: they have at first perchance disliked only some significant Ceremonies in Gods Worship, of Humane Appointment, but thence they have gone on to deny all outward bodily Reverence, and thought it not expedient to pull off their Hats in Churches, then not to do it before Magistrates, at last not at all: and thus by giving place to such little Scruples, they become afraid of speaking, looking, or doing any thing like other Men.

This is notorious amongst us. Those who have taken Offence at some things in our Church, and have thereupon separated from us, and associated themselves with a purer Congregation, have soon disliked something amongst them also; and then they would reform themselves farther, and after that refine themselves more still, till at last they have sunk down either into Quakerism, Popery, or Atheism. This doth not only now and then happen in the World, but is the probable effect of embracing and cherishing such Scruples, that men go on scrupling one thing after another, till at length they doubt of every thing.

5. Lastly, This needless scrupling of lawful things hath done unspeakable mischief to the Church of Christ, especially to the Reformed *Church of England*; a Church reformed according to the most Primitive and Apostolical Pattern, by the best and wisest Rules, in which, even by

the Confession of the soberest and most considerable of our Dissenters nothing is required, as a condition of Communion, that is sinful; yet how is the rent and torn, mangled and divided, how hath she been assaulted, undermined, and in danger to be the second time overthrown upon the Account only of Habits and Gestures, and particular Forms, Rites, and Modes of Discipline and Worship, with which some Men are not well satisfied or pleased, which they judge might be better done and ordered another way, or which they rather would have left at liberty, that every man may do therein according to his own Discretion or Opinion.

In the great and necessary Truths of Religion we all profess to be agreed. We all worship the same God, believe in the same Lord and Saviour, have the same Baptism, the same Faith, the same Hope, the same common Interest, our Sacraments, as to the main, are rightly administered according to our Saviour's Institution, our Churches are acknowledged to be true Churches of *Jesus Christ*: but there are some Constitutions, which respect chiefly outward Order and the decent Performance of Divine Worship, against which men have received strange Prejudices, on the account of them have raised a mighty noise and clamour against the Church, and have openly separated from its Communion, as if by renouncing of Popery we had only exchanged one idolatrous Service for another. About these skirts and Borders, the dress and circumstances of Religion hath been all our quarelling and contention; and these Differences have proceeded to such an height, as to beget immortal Feuds and Animosities, to break and crumble us into little Parties and Fractions, whereby mutual Edification is hindred, our common Religion suffers Reproach, the Enemies of it are strengthened and encouraged, publick Peace endangered, and brotherly Love, the Badge of Christ's Disciples, quite lost amongst us: and the continu-

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ance of these miserable Distractions amongst us upon such frivolous Accounts (if compared with the Interests of Peace and Charity) is a matter of sad consideration to all lively Members of Christ's Body, and forebodes great evils impendent over our Church and State. I doubt not to say, that the Devil hath fought more successfully against Religion under the Mask of a zealous Reformer, than under any other disguise whatever.

The grand Enemy of Mankind hath by various ways and means all along contriv'd and endeavour'd to defeat the designs of Heaven for the Good and Happiness of Men: and as the Divine Wisdom hath in several Ages of the World manifested it self for the encouraging and promoting of true Righteousness and Holiness, so hath the Devil always been at work to oppose what he could find most proper for the hindring the good effect of God's Kindness towards us. When the fullness of Time came, by the appearance of the Son of God in the World, he was in a great measure dethroned, his Kingdom overthrown, and the last and most effectual means were used for the recovery of Men out of his Snare and Power. When therefore he perceived that by all the grievous Persecutions he rais'd against the Church it spread only so much the faster, that at last the whole Heathen Idolatry fell down before the Cross of Christ; when he was shamefully expelled out of his Temples, and from his Altars, his Oracles silenced, and the Religion of Jesus prevailed every where; he then betook himself to his old Serpentine Arts of dissimulation. Since he could no longer oppose Christ's Kingdom by open War, he resolv'd to turn Christian, and to set up for Christ's Deputy, and substitute here on Earth, to fight against Christians under Christ's Banner, and by adulterating and corrupting the Christian Doctrine, to spoil it of all its Efficacy, to introduce his old Heathen Rites and Idolatrous Ceremonies, as unwritten Traditions from Christ himself or his Apostles, and so
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under his Name and pretended Authority to exercise all that cruelty, oppression, and fraud, which is so pleasing to his own infernal Nature, hoping to burn, destroy, root out all true Christians from the face of the Earth, under colour of propagating the Catholick Faith, and enlarging Christ's Kingdom in the World,

When *Christendom* had long groaned under this miserable Tyranny, it pleased God in many places of *Europe*, but especially here in *England*, to set on foot a Reformation of Religion, which was happily and peaceably accomplished among us by the favour and countenance of publick Authority and the wise Counsel and Advice of our Reverend Bishops and other Ministers. To nip this in the Bud, the Devil raised that sharp Persecution in *Qu. Mary's* days, in which our first Reformers gloriously sealed what they had done with their Blood: but this proving ineffectual, that he might the better frustrate the ends of our Reformation, himself would turn Reformer too; A great Cry was soon raised against our Church, as not sufficiently purged from Popery, our Bishops, our Prayers, our Ceremonies were all Antichristian, and it was not long before all Ministers, Tythes, Temples, and the Universities too, were condemned as such; and God knows they had well nigh reformed away all Learning, true Religion, and Worship of God, and under the specious Pretence of paring off all Superfluities, had grievously shaken the Foundations of Christianity it self; insomuch, that it came to pass, as some of those who now dissent from us did then complain, That *Professors of Religion did openly oppose and deride almost all that Service of God out of Conscience, which other Men used to do out of Prophaneness*. And what infinite mischief this rash and intemperate Zeal for reforming Abuses and Corruptions hath done to our Church and Nation, if the Experience of this last Age will not sufficiently convince men, it is not to be hoped that any Discourse should.

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We little consider whose Interest we thus serve and promote: we do his work who is most delighted with Strife and Confusion, and every one can tell who that is, and where he reigns. To be sure by these uncharitable Separations we highly gratifie the common Enemy, whose great Design and Policy it hath all along been, by the Follies and invincible Scruples of Protestant Dissenters to weaken, and by degrees pull down the *Church of England*, and then we all become an easie Prey to *Rome*.

If any now tell me, that to prevent this great Mischief and Danger that ariseth from our Divisions, it is not so necessary that the People should lay down their Scruples, (which they cannot well do, since no one can at any time think or believe as he will) as it is that the Impositions themselves, the Matters scrupled at, should be removed and taken away, and then Peace and Unity may be better secured. To this I only answer these two things:

1. I now consider things as they at present stand amongst us. We have a Church settled and established by Law, in which nothing that is sinful is enjoined. What the Duty of our Governours and Superiours is, how far they may or ought to condescend to the Weakness or Scruples of others, I shall not take upon me to determine; that is another Question which belongs not to us. But I consider now only what private Members of such a Church are to do, and then I say, scrupling the Use of some things prescribed by the Church, will not justifie our leaving it; nay, as I shall shew afterwards, it is our best and safest course to submit and comply with such Orders, notwithstanding our Scruples. But I add,

2. If this were a sufficient Reason why the Constitution of any Church should be altered, because some things are scrupled in it, there never could be a settled Church as long as the World stands; for, since there will be always a difference in Mens Understandings and Tempers, some
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weak and injudicious, others peevish and proud, there will consequently be many that shall scruple and be offended at the best and most innocent Constitutions. And if the Ceremonies now in use amongst us had not been retained at our first Reformation, those very Persons, who are now so much dissatisfied with the Imposition of them, would perhaps have been the first that should have then complained of the want of them. Of which we have this notorious and undeniable Evidence in the late times, when our Church was laid in the Dust, when none of those Ceremonies or Forms which are now objected against were imposed or commonly used, yet even then were men gathering Congregations out of Congregations, purifying and reforming still further; Scruples increased, Sects and Divisions upon them multiplied, and never such Distractions and Confusions in Religion as in those days; and without the gift of Prophecy one may foretell, that if what is principally found fault with in our Church was now abolished, yet those that are given to Scruples would at least in time find cavelling Objections against any Constitution that can be made. They are like Men given to sue and go to Law. They never want some Pretence to disturb themselves and their Neighbours.

Men may talk of reconciling our Differences, and making up our Breaches to their Lives end, and propound their several Projects, and frame their Models, and conceive fine designs of Union and Accommodation, yet none of these will have any effect, or do any good, till Men learn Humility and Modesty, and be contented to be governed by others in things indifferent, till Self-conceit and Pride be in some measure rooted out; and when this is effectually done, there will then be found but little need of any Alteration in the present Constitution.

The foundation of our Peace and Agreement must be laid in the reforming our selves and our own Tempers.

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The way to unite us lieth not so much in amending the present Establishment, Government, Liturgy, endeavouring to add to it, or leave out of it, till all Parties amongst us are satisfied, (which indeed can never be effected) as it doth consist in our becoming more truly Christian in our Lives and Tempers. They are our vicious Dispositions, more than our different Apprehensions, that keep us at such a distance. Let the terms of Communion with the Church be what they will, yet as long as Men retain the same quarrellous Mind, and industriously seek for Doubts and Scruples, and are glad to find them, and prefer their own private Opinion and Judgment before the Wisdom and Authority of all their Governours, whether Civil or Ecclesiastical, it is plain our Divisions and Animosities will not, cannot cease.

But this leads me to the last thing I design'd to discourse of; which was, to propound to you the best ways and means by which men may get rid of and ease their Minds of such Scruples; where I shall especially consider those that relate to our communicating with our Parish-Churches. You must not expect that I should descend to, and answer the particular Exceptions which hinder men from constant Communion with us; but only in general I shall crave leave to advise some few things, which would mightily tend to the removing those Doubts and Scruples that yet detain so many in a state of utter Separation from us, or at least discourage their total and hearty joyning with us. Which charitable Design and Attempt, however unsuccessful I may be in it, yet cannot, I hope, be unacceptable to any, whose Consciences are pester'd with such Scruples, since I endeavour only to deliver them from those Mistakes, which beside the disservice they do to Religion and the Protestant Interest, do also expose them to trouble and danger from the Publick Laws and Civil Magistrate. Of many Rules that might be given in this case, I shall insist only on these following.

I. We should take great care to beget and cherish in our Minds the most high, and worthy, and honourable Thoughts of God Almighty. This is the Foundation of all Religion; and as our Apprehensions of God are, such for the most part will be his Worship and Service. Accordingly as we conceive of his Nature, so shall we judge what things are most pleasing to him, as also what they are that are most offensive and distastful to him.

Now consider, I beseech you, Can that Man have becoming and excellent Thoughts of the Divine Nature, who imagines that God regards any particular Gestures, Habits, and Postures so far, as that the acceptance of our Service and Worship should depend upon such Circumstances of our Religious Actions? When with all Humility and true devotion of Heart a sincere Christian prostrates himself at the Throne of God's Grace, and with earnest Desire and Affections begs those good things that are according to Gods Mind and Will, can we believe that the Father of our Spirits shall refuse and reject his Petition because it is delivered in a certain prescribed form of Words? Shall his importunate renewed Requests fail of Success because he still useth the same Expressions, and reads his Prayers out of a Book? Is God pleased with variety of Words? or the copiousness of our Invention, or the elegance of our Phrase and Style? Is it not the Heart and inward frame of Spirit that God principally respects in all our Prayers? Or can we think so meanly of God, that he should shut his ears against the united Prayers of his People, because offended at the colour of the Garment in which the Minister officiates?

Suppose two Persons, both with equal Preparation, with true Repentance and Faith to approach the Lord's Table; one of them, out of a deep sense of his Unworthiness to receive so great Blessings, and out of a grateful acknowledgment of the Benefits therein conferr'd upon him, takes the Sacrament upon his Knees, in the humblest Posture; the other

other sitting or standing: can you think that the Sacrament is effectual or beneficial, or that God blesses it only to him that sits, or that it would not have been of the same advantage to him if he also had received it kneeling? To surmise any such thing, is surely to dishonour God, as if he were a low, poor, humourfome Being, like a Father that should disinherit his Child, tho in all Respects most dutiful to him, and every way deserving his greatest Kindness, only because he did not like his Complexion, or the colour of his Hair. The wiser and greater any Person is to whom we address our selves, the less he will stand upon little Punctilio's.

Under the Jewish Law the minutest circumstances of Worship were exactly described and determined by God himself, and it was not ordinarily lawful for the Priests at all to vary from them. But it was necessary then that it should be thus; because the Jewish Worship was typical of what was to come hereafter, and those many nice Observances that were appointed were not commanded for themselves, as if there were any Excellency in them, but they were shadows of things to come, which are all now done away by the Gospel, and the bringing in of everlasting Righteousness, the only thing always pleasing to God, and agreeable to his Nature: It is a spiritual rational Service God now expects from us, and delights in; and he must look upon God as a very fond and capricious Being, who can perswade himself that our Prayers and Thanksgivings, and other Acts of Worship, tho we be most hearty and devout in them, yet shall be rejected by him only because of some particular Habits or Gestures we used, which were neither dishonourable to God, nor unsuitable to the nature of those religious Performances.

Such mean Thoughts of God are the true ground of all Superstition, when we think to court and please him by making great Conscience about little things; and so it hath

been truly observed, that there is far more Superstition in conscientious abstaining from that which God hath no where forbid, than there is in doing that which God hath not commanded. A man may certainly do what God hath not commanded, and yet never think to flatter God by it, nor place any Religion in it, but he may do it only out of obedience to his Superiours, for outward Order and Decency, for which end our Ceremonies are appointed, and so there is no Superstition in them. But now a Man cannot out of Conscience refuse to do what God hath not forbid, and is by lawful Authority required of him, but he must think to please God by such abstaining: and in this conceit of pleasing or humouring God by indifferent things, consists the true Spirit of Superstition.

2. Lay out your great care and zeal about the necessary and substantial duties of Religion, and this will make you less concerned about things of an inferiour and indifferent nature. As on the one hand our fierce Disputes and Debates about little things and circumstances are apt to eat out the Heart and Life of Religion, so on the other side, minding those things most, in which the Power of Religion doth consist, is the best way to cure our Scrupulousness about little things. This was the Apostle's Advice to the *Romans*, cap. 14. amongst whom eating or not eating some Meats, observing or not observing some days, had occasioned as much Trouble and Scruple as Forms of Prayer and Ceremonies do now amongst us, *ver. 17. The Kingdom of God is not Meat or Drink, but Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost.* What needs all this Stir and Bustle? This censuring, disputing, and dividing about Standing or Kneeling, these are not the great matters of our Faith; they are not worth so much Noise and Contention. The great stress and weight in our Religion is laid upon the Duties of a righteous and holy Life, and a peaceable Spirit and Conversation, and then he adds,

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ver. 18. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of Men.

Thus when you betake your selves to your Prayers, let it be your greatest care to fix in your Minds a due sense of God's Infinite Majesty, of your own Vileness and Unworthiness, of your manifold Wants and Necessities, and the greatness and goodness of the things you petition for, and his readiness to grant them upon your humble Request; and the more you do this, the less solicitous you will be about the form or words of your Prayers. He that minds those things most on which the efficacy of his Prayers for Christ's sake doth depend, will not stand in need of, nor require new Phrases every time to stir his Attention or to raise his Affection. Thus let Men be very diligent and conscientious in preparing themselves for the Holy Communion; let them come thereunto with lively Apprehensions of Christ's Love in dying for us, with hearty Resolutions of Amendment, and true Charity towards all Men; the more concerned they are about these necessary things, the less afraid will they be of offending God by kneeling at the Administration, or coming up to receive it in one part of the Church rather than another: for, they will find that they are quite other things in which true Religion consists, in a new Nature, in a divine temper of Mind, in the constant Practice of Holiness, Righteousness, and Charity; which make a Man really better, and more like unto God.

He that places any Religion in not putting off his Hat, or sitting at the Sacrament, or not standing up at the Creed or Gospel, as I before shew'd you, hath no worthy Thoughts of God; so neither hath he any right Notion of Christianity, which consists only in unfeigned Piety towards God, and sincere Love to our Brother, not in any external Rites or Observances, which are in their own Nature variable and mutable, and are different in several Churches.

3. It would greatly contribute to the removing these Scruples which hinder the blessed Union of Christians amongst us, if men were but really willing to receive satisfaction. This alone would go half way towards conquering them. But when they are grown fond of and nourish their Doubts and Prejudices, and converse only with those Men, read only those Books, and hear those Discourses which are made of their side, which serve to heighten and strengthen their Jealousies and Suspicions, when they avoid the means of Conviction as dangerous Snares and Temptations, and look upon this tenderness or aptness to be offended, as a sign of Grace and extraordinary Conscientiousness, there can be but little hopes of recovering such Persons to a right apprehension of things. Whereas would they come once to distrust their own Judgments, to suppose that they may perhaps be all this while mistaken, would they calmly and patiently hear, faithfully and impartially consider what is said or wrote against them, as eagerly desire and seek for satisfaction, as Men do for cure of any Disease they are subject unto; would they, I say, thus diligently use all fit means and helps for the removal of their Scruples, before they troubled the Church of Christ with them, it would not prove so very difficult a Task to convince and settle such teachable Minds.

If therefore any Man be possessed with Doubts or Scruples against any thing practised or required in our Church, let him first read some of those excellent Books, that are written with all the fairness and evidence imaginable, on purpose to explain and justify those things that are most usually excepted against; let him consult with some of our Church before he leaves it. Let him honestly repair to the Minister, of his Parish, or some other whom he hath in greater estimation, and ingenuously open his Mind to him, declaring what it is he most stumbles at, and hear what can be offered for the Resolution of his Doubts. If consulting with

with one Person will not do it, let him advise with others, and try this often, before he condemns us, and divides from us. Would Men do this seriously, with earnest desire of instruction, without doubt we should have far fewer Separatists, and they who after this did still dissent from us, would be far more excusable in it, than otherwise they are, and this is no other than what men ordinarily do in their temporal Affairs. When they have any fear or suspicion about their worldly concerns, they presently repair to those who are best skill'd, and most able to resolve them, and in their judgment and determination they commonly acquiesce and satisfy themselves. Hath any man a scruple about his Estate, whether it be firmly settled, or he hath a true legal Title to it? The way he takes for satisfaction is to advise with Lawyers, the most eminent for Knowledge and Honesty in their Profession. If they agree in the same Opinion, this is the greatest assurance he can have that it is right and safe. Thus is it with one that doubts whether such a custom or practise be for his Health, the opinion of known and experienced Physicians is the only proper means to determine him in such a Case. The reason is the same here. When any private Christian is troubled and perplexed with fears and scruples that concern his Duty, or the Worship of God, he ought in the first place to have recourse to the Publick Guides and Ministers of Religion, who are appointed by God, and are best fitted to direct and conduct him; I say, to come to them, not only to dispute and argue with them, and pertly to oppose them, but with all modesty to propound their doubts, meekly to hearken to and receive Instruction, humbly begging of God to open their Understandings that they may see and embrace the truth, taking great care that no evil affection, love of a Party, or carnal interest influence or byass their Judgments.

We do not by this desire men to pin their faith upon the Priests Sleeve, or to put out their own Eyes that they might
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be better guided and managed by them; but only diligently to attend to their Reasons and Arguments, and to give some due regard and deference to their Authority: for it is not so absurd, as may by some be imagined, for the Common People to take upon trust from their lawful Teachers, what they are not competent Judges of themselves.

But the difficulty here is, how shall a private Christian govern himself, when the very Guides and Ministers of Religion determine differently concerning these matters in question amongst us? Some warranting and allowing them, others as much disapproving and condemning them: by what Rule shall he choose his Guide? To which I briefly reply;

I. As for those who scruple at Conformity, and are tolerably able to judge for themselves, let not such relye barely upon the Authority either of the one or the other. All we desire of them is, that they would equally hear both sides, that they would think that the Ministers of the Church of *England* have some Sense and Conscience too as well as other Men, and are able to say somewhat for what they do themselves, or require of others; that laying aside all Prejudices, Favour to or admiration of Mens Persons, they would weigh and consider the Arguments that may be propounded to them, being diffident of their own Apprehensions, and indifferent to either part of the Question; that they would think it no shame to change their Mind when they see good reason for it. Could we thus prevail with the People diligently to examine the Merits of the cause, our Church would every day gain more Ground amongst all wise Men: for we care not how much Knowledge and Understanding our People have, so they be but humble and modest with it, nor do we desire Men to become our Profelytes any further than we give them good Scripture and Reason for it.

2. But as for those who are not so capable of examining or judging for themselves (as few of the common People who separate from us really are; they not being able to give any tolerable account of their dissent from us, only in general Words declaiming against Popery, Superstition, Antichristian and Unscriptural Ceremonies, Humane Traditions, &c.) such had better trust to and depend on those Ministers, of known Sufficiency for their Office, who are regularly and by the Laws of the Land set over them, than any other Guides or Teachers that they can choose for themselves. This to be sure is the safer course, which in doubtful cases is always to be taken. I speak now of these present Controversies about Forms and Ceremonies so hotly agitated amongst us, which are above the Sphere of common People, out of their profession; not of such things as concern the Salvation of all men, which are plain and evident to the meanest Capacities. When therefore in such cases, about which we cannot easily satisfy our selves, we follow the Advice of the publicly authorized Guides and Preachers of Religion, if they chance to mislead us, we have something to say or apologize for our selves. Our Error is more excusable and pardonable, as being occasion'd by those, to whose Judgment, by God's Command, we did owe a great Respect and Submission. But when we choose Instructors and Counsellors to our selves according to our own Fancy and liking, and they teach us contrary to the Doctrine of our lawful Ministers, if then we prove to be in the wrong, and are betray'd into Sin, we may thank our own Wantonness for it, and are more severely accountable for such Mistakes.

Thus let a Man that is troubled with any threatening disease, apply himself rather to the Licensed Physicians or Chyrurgions, of approved Skill and Honesty; and if he chance to miscarry under them, yet he hath this contentment, that he used the best and wisest means for his Health and Reco-

very. But if he leaves them all, and will hearken only to *Quacks* and *Empiricks*, tho they advise him quite contrary to what the others prescribed, if under their hands he grows worse and worse, he must then charge his own perverse Folly or idle Humour, as the cause of his Ruine.

4. In order to the curing of our Scruples, we should thoroughly understand and consider, what is the true Notion of lawful, and how it differs from what is necessary, and from what is sinful. That is necessary or our Duty which God hath expressly commanded, that is sinful which God hath forbid; that is lawful which God hath not by any Law obliging us either commanded or forbid: for, *Where there is no Law, saith the Apostle, there is no Transgression, Rom. 4. 15.* There can be no Transgression, but either omitting what the Law commands, or doing what the Law forbids. For instance, If any Man can shew where kneeling at the Sacrament is forbid in Scripture, where sitting is required; where praying by a Form is forbid, and extemporary Prayers are enjoined, then indeed the Dispute would soon be at an end: but if neither the one nor the other can be found, as most certainly they cannot, then kneeling at the Sacrament, and reading Prayers out of a Book, must be reckon'd amongst things lawful. And then there is no need of scrupling them, because they may be done without Sin: nay, where they are required by our Superiours, it is our Duty to submit to them, because it is our Duty to obey them in all lawful things.

This way of arguing is very plain and convincing, and cannot be evaded but by giving another Notion of Lawful. And therefore it is commonly said, that nothing is lawful, especially in the Worship of God, which God himself hath not prescribed and appointed, or that hath been abused to evil Purposes. And on these two Mistakes are chiefly grounded Mens Scruples about indifferent Rites and Ceremonies in God's Worship.

1. That only is said to be lawful in God's Worship which he himself hath prescribed and appointed; so that this is thought Exception sufficient against the Forms and Usages of our Church, that though they are not forbid, yet they are no where commanded in Scripture. *Who hath required these things at your hands?*

Now here I only ask, Where our Saviour or his Apostles have forbid us doing any thing in God's Worship, which is not by himself commanded, or where in the New Testament we are told, that God will be angry with us for doing any thing which he hath no where forbid, either by general or particular Laws? For unless this can be shewn, there can be no colour for this Pretence, and we are sufficiently sure, that no such Place can be produced out of the Bible. It is acknowledged by all, that the Holy Scriptures, as to all that is necessary to be believed or done in order to Salvation, as to all the essential and substantial Parts of Divine Worship, is a plain and perfect Rule; but it is as certain, that the outward Circumstances of Time, Place, Habit, and Gesture, are not determined in the New Testament, as they were in many cases by *Moses's* Law: and yet God cannot be, at least visibly and publicly, worshipped without them. If therefore these be not determined in Scripture, and it is unlawful to do any thing in God's Worship but what is so determined, it follows that God cannot be worshipped at all, unless we could worship him in no Time, Place, Habit, or Gesture: nor indeed can I learn how a Christian can, with a good Conscience, perform any part of God's Worship, if this Principle be admitted for true, that whatsoever is not commanded is forbid, since the external Circumstances of religious Actions, without which they cannot be performed, are not prescribed or determined in Scripture; and so he must commit a Sin every time he prays or receives the Holy Sacrament.

Besides, this Reason would oblige us to separate from all the Churches that ever were or are in the World, there being no constituted Church in which there are not some Orders and Injunctions for the regulating the publick Worship of God no where commanded in Scripture. We could never, upon this Principle, have held Communion with the Primitive Churches, which undoubtedly had their instituted significant Ceremonies; nor is there any Church at this day, that hath not by its own Authority determined some of the Circumstances of Divine Service for the more decent and orderly Performance thereof. Nay, those very Persons that make this Exception, do themselves practise many things in the Worship of God, without the least shadow of a Divine Command, to which they oblige their Hearers and Communicants: for, conceived Prayers, sitting at the Eucharist, sprinkling the Infant at Baptism, the Minister's officiating in a black Cloak or Coat, are full out as unscriptural, humane, uncommanded, as any Gesture, Habit, or Form used in our Church.

2. That is said to be unlawful which hath been abused to sinful Purposes, to Idolatry or Superstition; so that nothing ought to be retained in our Worship, tho it be not forbid by God, which was used in times of Popery. Hence the ordinary Objection against our Parish Churches is, that they are not sufficiently purged from Popery; that our first Reformers were indeed excellent and worthy Persons for the Times they lived in; that what they did was very commendable and a good Beginning, but they were forced to comply with the necessities of the Age, which would not bear a compleat Reformation. They left a great deal of *Papish* Trash in the Church, hoping by degrees to reconcile the Papists to it, or at least, that they might not make the Breach too wide, and too much prejudice or estrange them from it. But we now live under better means, have greater Light and Knowledge, and so a further

ther and more perfect Amendment is now necessary. Thus the Order of Bishops is decried as Popish and Antichristian, our Liturgy as taken out of the Mass Book, and our Ceremonies as Relicks of Idolatry.

But the truth of the case is this. We must consider, that those of the Church of *Rome* do hold and maintain all the Essentials of Christianity, but then by degrees, as they found Opportunity, they have added a number of impious and pernicious Doctrines to the Christian Faith, the Belief and Profession of which they equally require of all that are in their Communion. Besides this, they have introduced several idolatrous, and superstitious Rites and Practises into the Service of their Church, never heard of for the first four hundred Years, by which they have miserably defaced and corrupted the Worship of God, and made it necessary for all those that love their own Salvation, to separate from them. Now our first Reformers here in *England* did not go about to invent a new Species of Government, to devise new Rites and Ceremonies and a new form of Worship, such as should be least excepted against, and then obtrude it upon this Nation, as was done at *Geneva*, and some other places; but they wisely considered, that if they did but reject what the *Romanists* had added to the Faith and Worship of Christians, lay aside their novel Inventions, Usurpations, and unwritten Traditions, there would remain the pure, simple, Primitive Christianity, such as it was before the *Roman* Church was thus degenerated: nor have we any thing of Popery left amongst us, but what the Papists had left amongst them of Primitive Religion and Worship.

As we must not receive the evil for the sake of the good, so neither must we reject the good for the sake of the evil. In our Church we pray neither to Saints nor Angels, nor the Virgin *Mary*, our Liturgy is in a known Tongue; we deny the Laity no part of the Sacrament, nor the reading of the

the Scriptures, we offer no Mass Sacrifice, nor Worship Images or the consecrated Bread. We have not one Doctrine or Ceremony in use amongst us, that is purely Popish. But we must be obliged to part with the most sacred, venerable and usefulest things in our Religion, if this be a sufficient reason of our forbearing any thing, because the Papists abuse it.

This therefore I conclude to be the best and plainest rule for the governing of our Consciences, not wilfully to omit any thing that God hath commanded, to avoid to the utmost of our Power what God hath forbid; and what ever else we have no particular Divine Law about, to guide our selves by the general Rules of Scripture, the commands of our Superiours, and by the measures of Prudence, Peace, and Charity. This one rule (and it cannot but seem a very reasonable one) would soon put an end to our squabbles and janglings about Forms and Ceremonies and other indifferent things.

5. In order to the bringing men to a compliance with the Laws of our Church, we must desire them to consider that there never was nor ever will be any publick Constitution, that will be every way unexceptionable. The best policy, whether Civil or Ecclesiastical, that can be established will have some flaws and defects, which must be borne and tolerated. Some Inconveniences will in process of time arise, that never could be foreseen or provided against; and to make alteration upon every emergent difficulty may be often of worse consequence, than the evil we pretend to cure by it. Let the Rules and Modes of Government, Discipline, publick Worship, be most exact and blameless, yet there will be faults in Governours and Ministers as long as they are but men. We must not expect in this World a Church without Spot or Wrinkle, that consists only of Saints, in which nothing can be found amiss; especially by those who lye at the catch and wait for an advantage against it.

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If men will scruple and reform, as long as any thing remaineth which they can object against, they must e'en come at last, as a Reverend Person of our Church hath observed, to the state of that miserable Man who left all humane Society that he might not be defiled with other Mens Sins, and at last cut out the Contents of Chapters and Titles of Books out of the Bible, because they were humane Inventions added to the pure Word of God. Men must be willing, if ever they would promote Peace and Unity, to put candid Constructions and favourable Interpretations upon things, to take them by the best handle, and not strain things on purpose that they might cavil the more plausibly, and raise more considerable Objections against them. We must not make personal, accidental Faults, nor any thing a pretence for our leaving the Communion of our Church, which ariseth only from the necessary condition and temper of all humane Affairs, that nothing here is absolutely perfect.

6. And lastly, if you cannot by these, and other the like considerations, not now to be mentioned, get rid of, and conquer your Scruples, then be advised to lay them aside, to throw them out of your Minds as dangerous Temptations, and act positively against them.

But here I easily imagine some ready presently to ask me, Do you perswade us to conform to the Orders of the Church tho we are not satisfied in our Minds concerning them? I answer, That I think this the best Advice that can be given to such scrupulous Persons. It would be an endless infinite thing, and Communion with any Church would be altogether unpracticable, if every private Christian was obliged to suspend joyning himself to it, till he was perfectly satisfied about the reasonableness and expediency of all that was required, or was in use in that Church: for indeed, private Persons are by no means proper Judges of what is fit and convenient in the Administration of Church-

Church-Government, Discipline, or publick Worship, no more than they are of matters of State, or the Reasonableness of all Civil Laws. Common People generally have neither Patience to consider, nor Judgment to weigh all Circumstances, nor Wisdom to choose that which is best; these things of a Publick Nature belong only to our Superiours and Governours, and if they appoint what is unfit, indecent, or inconvenient, they only are accountable for it. It is not the fault of those that joyn with such Worship, or yield to such Injunctions (not plainly sinful) for the sake of Peace and Order.

I know therefore no better Rule for the directing and quieting Mens Consciences than this, that as to all such Matters as relate to Publick Order and decent Administration of God's Worship, they should without any superstitious Fearfulness comply with the Customs of the Church they live in, never troubling themselves, nor curiously examining what is best and fittest, as long as there is nothing enjoyned or done, which (after due enquiry) appears to us contrary to any Law of God. Thus St. *Augustin* directs us in that often quoted place, where he tells us, *He knew no better course for a serious prudent Christian to take, in matters of Rites and Customs, than to follow the Churches Example where he is: for whatsoever is prescribed neither against Faith or Manners, is a matter in its self indifferent, and to be observed according to the Custom of those he lives among.* This was agreeable to the Counsel St. *Ambrose*, Bishop of *Milan*, gave him when he was sent by his Mother to enquire his Judgment about the Saturday Fast, *When I am at Rome, saith the Bishop, I fast on the Sabbath, but at Milan I do not. So thou likewise, when thou comest to any Church, observe its Custom, if thou wouldest neither be an offence to them, nor have them be so to thee.* Which St. *Augustin* ever after looked upon as an Oracle from Heaven.

I do not by this encourage Men to venture blindfold on Sin, or to neglect any reasonable care of their Actions; but if People raise all the Difficulties and Objections they can start, before they proceed to a Resolution about things that have no manifest Impiety in them, nor are plainly nor by any easie consequence, contrary to the revealed Will of God, this cannot but occasion infinite Perplexity and Trouble to Mens Minds, and there are but few things they shall be able to do with a safe and quiet Conscience. Should all those that have some little Arguments against the Sign of the Cross, puzzle themselves with the Objections usually urged against Infant Baptism, and defer baptizing their Children till they were fully satisfied about it, I doubt not but the baptizing of Infants would soon be as much scrupled at as the crossing them now is. But there is no apparent Evil in it; it is the Practice of the Church we live in, it is no where forbid in Scripture: this ordinarily is sufficient Warrant for what we do.

Before we separate from a Church, or refuse to comply with its Orders, we ought to be fully satisfied and persuaded of the Unlawfulness of what is required, that it is forbid by God; because by leaving the Communion of any Church, we pass Sentence upon and condemn it, which ought not to be done upon light and doubtful causes: but there is not the same necessity that we should be thus fully satisfied about our Conformity to all things prescribed by the Church. We may presume them to be innocent, unless they plainly appear to us otherwise.

The Judicious and Learned Bishop *Sanderfon* thus expresseth it in his fourth Sermon *Ad Clerum*, *The Law taketh every Man for a good Man and true, till his Truth and Honesty be legally disproved: and as our Saviour sometimes said, He that is not against us is for us: so in these matters (he speaks of those Ceremonies that for Order's sake, and to add the greater Solemnity to sacred Actions, are appointed in the*

Church) we are to believe all things to be lawful for us to do, which cannot be shewn by good Evidence either of Scripture or Reason to be unlawful.

If any one be afraid that this Principle once imbibed would introduce Popery, make People greedily swallow, and without any Examination submit to every thing their Superiours please to impose upon them, let him only consider (which we all agree in) that there are many things in the *Popish* Worship and Religion manifestly evil, and forbidden by the revealed Will of God, - which renders our Separation from them necessary, and so consequently justifiable: whereas the things objected against in our Church are at worst only doubtful and suspicious, or rather not so good and expedient as might be devised: and this surely makes a wide difference in the case.

But doth not St. Paul say, *Rom. 14. 19. I know and am perswaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of it self, but to him that esteemeth any thing unclean it is unclean?* Doth not he expressly tell us, *That whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin?* that is, Whatever we do without a full Persuasion of the lawfulness of it, tho it be not so in it self, yet is a Sin in him that doth it against his Conscience. And doth not the Apostle say, *He that doubteth is damned if he eat*, before he is convinced that it may be done? I desire here therefore only to be rightly understood, and then these things are soon reconciled.

1. When I speak of a Scrupulous Conscience, I suppose the Person tolerably well perswaded of the lawfulness of what is to be done, but yet he doth not like or approve of it, he hath some little Reasons and Exceptions against it, it is not the best and fittest, all things considered. This is properly a Scruple, and is certainly the case of all those, who do sometimes (to save themselves from the severity of the Laws) joyn in our Worship, and communicate with us; which we presume they would never do did they judge

judge it absolutely sinful and forbidden by God. So that though it should be granted that a man cannot innocently do that of which his Conscience doubts whether it be lawful or not, yet a Man may, and in some cases is bound to do that which is not unlawful, though upon some other Accounts he scruples the doing of it.

2. If the Question be about things wherein we are left wholly to our selves, and at Liberty, having no very weighty Reason for the doing of them, then it may be the safest way to forbear all such things we scruple at. Of such cases the Apostle speaks in the fore-mentioned Places, of eating or not eating some Meats; neither of them was required by any Law. Eating was no instance of Duty, nor was it any ways forbid Christians: where to do or not to do is perfectly at our own choice, it is best for a Man to forbear doing that of which he hath some suspicion, tho he be not sure that it is sinful. As suppose a man have Scruples in his Mind about playing at Cards and Dice, or going to see Stage-Plays, or putting out his Money to Usury, because there is no great Reason or Necessity for any of these things, and to be sure they may be innocently forborn without any Detriment to our selves or others; though we do not judge them absolutely sinful, yet it is safest for him who cannot satisfy himself concerning the Goodness and Fitness of them, wholly to deny himself the use of them. But in these two cases it is most for the quiet of our Consciences, to act against or notwithstanding our Fears and Scruples, when either our Superiours, to whom we owe Obedience, have interposed their Commands, or when by it we prevent some great Evil or Mischief.

1. When our Superiours, either Civil or Ecclesiastical, whom by the Will of God we are bound to obey in all lawful things, have interposed their Commands, our Scruples will not excuse or justify our Disobedience. If indeed

we judge what is commanded to be absolutely unlawful, tho it be a false erroneous Judgment, yet whilst we are under such persuasion we are by no means to do it upon any Inducement whatever.

If I only doubt of the lawfulness of any particular Action, and it be an instance wherein I am at liberty, I am still bound not to do it. For, *Whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin.* I am certainly innocent when I forbear; I may commit a Sin, If I do it, Wisdom would therefore, that the safer part be chosen. But now if I am by the command of my Superiours obliged to it, my choice is then determined, it then becomes my Duty, and it can never be safe or advisable to neglect a plain Duty for an uncertain Offence. Thus most and best *Casuits* do determine about a doubtful Conscience, particularly the forenamed reverend Bishop, in the same Sermon, *Whatsoever is commanded us by those whom God hath set over us, either in Church, Commonwealth, or Family* (quod tamen not sit certum displicere Deo, *saieth St. Bernard*) *which is not evidently contrary to the Law and Will of God, ought to be of us received and obeyed no otherwise than as if God himself had commanded it, because God himself hath commanded us to obey the Higher Powers, and to submit our selves to their Ordinances.*

But now this is more plain concerning Fears and Scruples only about the conveniency and expediency of things, these ought all to be despised when they come in Competition with the Duty of Obedience. Would men but think themselves in Conscience bound to pay the same Duty and respect to the Judgment and Authority of Magistrates and Governours, whether in Church or State, as they do expect their Servants and Children should to themselves, they would soon see the reasonableness of such submission. For all Government and Subjection would be very precarious and arbitrary, if every one that did not approve of a Law

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or was not fully satisfied about the reasonableness of it, was thereby exempted from all Obligations to obey it. This is to give the Supreme Authority to the most humourful or perverse sort of Christians: for, according to this principle, no publick Laws and Constitutions can be valid and binding, unless every scrupulous, tho a very ignorant Conscience, consent to them.

2. We are not to mind or stand upon our Scruples, when they probably occasion a great evil, a general mischief. They are not fit to be put in the balance with the Peace of the Church and Unity of Christians. Suppose for once that our publick way of Worship is not the best that can be devised, that many things might be amended in our Liturgy, that we could invent a more agreeable Establishment than this present is (which yet no man in the World can ever tell, for we cannot know all the inconveniences of any Alteration, till it comes to be tryed) yet granting all this, it cannot be thought so intolerable an Evil as contempt of God's Solemn Worship, dividing into Sects and Parties, living in Debate, Contention, and Separation from one another. If there be some Rites and Customs amongst us not wisely chosen or determined, some Ceremonies against which just Exceptions may be made, yet to forsake the Communion of such a true Church of Jesus Christ, and set up a distinct Altar in opposition to it, to combine and associate into separate Congregations, is (as it is somewhere expressed) *like knocking a man on the head because his Teeth are rotten, or his Nails too long.* How much more agreeable is it to the Christian Temper, to be willing to sacrifice all such Doubts and Scruples to the Interests of publick Order and divine Charity; for better surely it is to serve God in a defective imperfect manner, to bear with many Disorders and Faults, than to break the Bond of Peace and brotherly Communion.

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For this we have the Example of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, who lived and died in Communion with a Church where there were far greater Corruptions both as to Persons and Practises, than can be pretended to be in ours at this day; yet though he was the great Reformer of Mankind, he forsook not the Jewish Church, but assembled with them in their publick Synagogues, which answer to our Parish-Churches, preached in the Temple though they had made it a Den of Thieves, observed their Festivals, tho some of them of humane Institution, nay commanded his Disciples to continue to hear the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, tho they were a most vile and wretched Generation of Men. Great were the Pollutions and Misdemeanours in the Churches of *Rome*, *Corinth*, *Galatia*, yet no one Member of them is ever commanded to come out or separate from those Churches to joyn in a purer Congregation or to avoid mixt Communion, or for better Edification. For Men to be drunk at the Sacrament was certainly a worse Fault than to kneel at it, or for a wicked Man to intrude himself; yet the Apostle doth not advise any to withdraw from that Church, but only every one to examine himself. We ought to do all that we can do without Sin, submit to an hundred things which are against our Mind or we had rather let alone, for the sake of Peace and Unity, so desirable in it self, so necessary for the Glory of God, the Honour of Religion, for our common Interest and Safety, for the Preservation of what I may, without Vanity, call the best Church in the World.

I cannot stand now to tell you, how earnestly this Duty of maintaining Unity amongst Christians is pressed in the New Testament; how concerned our Blessed Master was, that all his Disciples should agree together and live as Brethren; how severely the Holy Apostles chid and rebuked those

those that caused Divisions and Strife amongst Christians, reckoning Schism and Contention amongst the most heinous and dangerous Sins. It should make both the Ears (one would think) of some amongst us to tingle, but to hear what Sense the Primitive Christians had of the sinfulness of separating from and breaking the Communion of Christians, nay, what the old Non-conformists here in *England* have said of it, yet remaining in Print, charging the People to be as tender of Church-Division as they were of Drunkenness, Whoredom, or any other enormous Crime. And did Men know and consider the evil of Schism, they would not be so ready, upon every slight occasion, to split upon that Rock.

Let us therefore divert our Fears and Scruples upon greater Sins. It is far more certain, that causeless Separation from the Communion of Christians is sinful, than that Kneeling at the Sacrament, or Praying by a Book, is such. Why then have Men such invincible Scruples about one, and none at all about the other? They run headlong into the Separate Assemblies, which surely are more like to Schismatical Conventicles than any thing in our Church is to Idolatry. Let Men be as scrupulous and fearful of offending against the Christian Laws of Subjection, Peaceableness, and Charity, as they are of worshipping God after an impure manner, and this alone will contribute much to the making up those Breaches which threaten sudden Ruine to our Church and Nation. I only add here, that in all that I have now said I am not conscious to my self, that I have used any Argument or affirmed any thing, but what many of those very Ministers, who now dissent from us, did teach, and maintain, and print too, against the *Independents* and other Sectaries that divided from them when they preached in the Parish-Churches. And if this was good Doctrine against those who separated upon the account of

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Corruptions, for purer Ordinances in those Days, I see not why it is not as good against themselves, when upon the very same Pretences, and no other, they divide from us now.

The Lord grant that we may all come at last to be of one Mind, to live in Peace and Unity, and then the God of Love and Peace shall be with us.

FINIS.
